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ABSTRACT

Observing that educators can have a healthy impact on students by making them aware of the implications of sexist language, its distortions and ambiguity as well as its demeaning and alienating effect on females, this paper presents a number of exercises and activities on sexist and nonsexist language usage both for high school and college English classes and for teacher education classes. Exercises for English classes are divided into several categories: (1) introductory consciousness raising, (2) connotative/denotive language, (3) clarity, (4) audience response, (5) sexist language in literature, and (6) nonsexist usage. The section for teacher preparation classes starts with consciousness-raising activities that concern both the use of sexist language in academic contexts and the origins and justifications of the generic masculine. Practical application activities that follow include tactics for combating the effects of sexist materials on students and simulation experiences in evaluating books and materials on the basis of their sexist or nonsexist applications. (HTH)

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Sexist Language and the Classroom: Exercises and Activities

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ABSTRACT

Sexist language is not a problem that is likely to be eradicated in the near future. But we as educators can have a healthy impact on our own classes by making our students aware of the implications of sexist language, its distortions and ambiguity as well as its demeaning and alienating effect on females. An experiential approach, coupled with a sense of humor and good will--rather than a judgmental or dictatorial one--will hopefully enable students to change their attitudes as well as their language usage and will give them greater insight into their own unconscious assumptions as well as those communicated by our male-oriented language.

This paper contains a number of exercises and activities on sexist and non-sexist language usage both for high school and college English classes and for teacher preparation classes. Exercises for English classes are divided into several categories: introductory consciousness-raising exercises, connotative/denotative language exercises (including the selection of details in creating slanted language), clarity exercises, audience response exercises, exercises on sexist language in literature, and non-sexist usage exercises. The section for teacher preparation classes starts with consciousness-raising activities that concern both the use of sexist language in academic contexts and also the origins and justifications of the generic masculine. Practical application activities follow which include tactics for combating the effects of sexist materials on students and also simulation experiences in evaluating books and materials on the basis of their sexist or non-sexist implications.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Exercises for High School and College English Classes

A. Introductory Exercises 2

B. Connotative/Denotative Language Exercises 4

C. Clarity Exercises 12

D. Audience Response Exercises 18

E. Sexist Language in Literature Exercises 20

F. Nonsexist Usage Exercises 21

II. Exercises for Teacher Preparation Classes

A. Consciousness Raising Exercises 24

B. Practical Application Exercises 30

III. Appendix: Nonsexist Language Guidelines

A. "Sex Equality in Educational Materials"

B. Holt, Rinehart and Winston Guidelines

C. McGraw Hill Guidelines

D. N.C.T.E. Guidelines

E. Scott, Foresman and Company Guidelines

FOREWORD

Sexist Language and the Classroom: Exercises and Activities

by Barbara Wade

Myth

> Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, "I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?" "You gave the wrong answer," said the Sphinx. "But that was what made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think."
>
> —Muriel Rukeyser[1]

Like Oedipus, many teachers are learning that the use of sexist language can have the undesired result of alienating audiences as well as failing to communicate ideas accurately and clearly. And many teachers have doubtless developed strategies for making their students aware of the effects and implications of sexist language. Yet few published articles have contained specific exercises or activities for classroom use. This paper is a collection of such exercises, both for high school and college English classes and for teacher preparation classes. The order in which they are presented is not necessarily the order in which they should be used (although the consciousness-raising exercises should logically precede practical application exercises); rather, teachers should select exercises appropriate for their particular classes and course outlines.

PART I: EXERCISES FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE ENGLISH CLASSES

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

An exercise that might be used in an introductory way to reveal to students the seriousness of the problem of sexual stereotyping through language is one suggested by Betty Renshaw in a handout entitled "Games/Exercises for Revealing/Dealing with Sexism."[2] (Note that this exercise might fit in naturally when discussing definition papers or the definition process.)

The Ideal Person

> Ask students to call out adjectives or phrases to describe "the ideal person," and write these on the board; do <u>not</u> specify the sex of this hypothetical person. Repeat the exercise for "the ideal male," and a third time for "the ideal female." Discuss the differences in the descriptions. Talk about why such distinctions are made, and the possible value (and disadvantages) of such categorizing. Are any of the traits generic in character? What part does social conditioning/programming play? Note especially any correlation between the lists for "the ideal person" and "the ideal male."

An extension of this exercise might involve looking at a number of passages where the assumption seems to be that all people are males, where even when non-gender specific terms are being used males are clearly indicated by the context - women are the exception or aberration. Ask how this definition of the male as the norm might affect thinking, roles or aspirations. How are male/female roles defined?

Male as Norm

> It's the great secret among doctors, known only to their wives, that most things get better by themselves.[3]

> Another difference between the Mariners and many other [fife and drum] corps is that it is strictly an adult group. It does not take in either women or students who are still in high school.[4]

> Our people are the best gamblers in the galaxy. We compete for power, fame, women. (Star Trek) [5]
>
> We find that holders of the MA and MS who enter this department do well in graduate work here. Their applications, like those of women, and of members of minority groups, are welcome. (University of Tennessee flyer, Psychology Department)[6]
>
> Sociologists . . . along with other persons, retain the sacred for their friends, their wives, and themselves. (Goffman, Encounters)[7]
>
> Sharing our railway compartment were two Norwegians and their wives.[8]
>
> Pioneers travelled West, taking their wives and children with them.

In the last three sentences, wives can be changed to husbands orally, and students can discuss both their responses to the change and the different assumptions that such a change would indicate.

Ads

Another introductory activity involves showing students a current ad that uses sexist language. (Some airline commercials have been especially blatant; "fly me" and "we move our tail for you" are two recent airline ad slogans that received a flurry of protests and could lead readily into a discussion of connotative meanings and uses of language. In addition, Ms. Magazine's "No Comment" pages feature a variety of sexist ads each month.) Discussion questions might include the following: 1) "What are underlying assumptions about women or men or about male or female roles?" and 2) "Do you find the language usage offensive? funny? persuasive?" After the discussion, tell students to bring in ads which they feel are sexist to share with the class. They might also each come with a paragraph explaining

why they find their ad objectionable or how the language works to create stereotypes or to demean women or men. All of the ads might be made into a collage and the culmulative effect of the ads discussed. Or a parallel collage could also be compiled of non-sexist ads, and students could compare the two, perhaps beginning to explore the question of the role of language in reinforcing as well as reflecting stereotypes. The class discussion of sexist ads could also provide the basis for a longer paper on sexism in advertising or even be the starting point for an exploration of language usage and logical fallacies in advertising.

CONNOTATIVE/DENOTATIVE LANGUAGE

As the last exercise perhaps suggested, exercises on sexist language fit particularly well in discussion of connotative and denotative meanings of words. Several options are available here, and these would be appropriate in communications courses as well as composition classes.

A particularly entertaining as well as experiential approach is to start with the subtle meanings that are expressed nonverbally. Have students look around the classroom to discover attitudes that are being expressed nonverbally, or if that seems too threatening to students, act out attitudes in posture and movement and have students identify them. Next, have the men act out the following set of directions:

1 Sit down in a straight chair. Cross your legs at the ankles and keep your knees pressed together.
2 Bend down to pick up an object from the floor. Each time you bend, remember to bend your knees so that your rear end doesn't stick up, and place one hand on your shirt-front to hold it to your chest.

3 Run a short distance, keeping your knees together. You will find you have to take short, high steps.
4 Sit comfortably on the floor. . . .Arrange your legs so that no one can see your underwear . Sit like this for a long time without changing position.
5 Walk around with your stomach pulled in tight, your shoulders thrown back, and your chest out. . . . Try to speak loudly and aggressively in this posture. 9

Then have the women adopt "masculine" stances and movements:

1 Sit comfortably, legs apart and arms away from your sides. Take up all of the available space.
2 Stand with both feet on the floor and legs apart. Breathe deeply. Address the person farthest away from you in a strong, confident voice.
3 Walk with long strides, arms swinging, head up.

Finally, have the women and men walk to meet each other, telling them to walk as they did in the previous exercise. Instruct the men to look away and to keep their faces expressionless as they meet the women. Tell the women to look boldly and openly at the men. After everyone has had a turn, discuss the feelings that were aroused. Then ask what is being communicated by these culture-prescribed postures and movements. What is the non-verbal language saying?

In a subsequent meeting, ask how the appropriate behavior for males and females is revealed through verbal language as well. Put student examples on the board. To supplement them (or if students have difficulty beginning), items from "How to Tell a Businessman from a Businesswoman" (A Pearl for Women's Liberation) can be used:

A businessman is aggressive; a businesswoman is pushy.

A business man is good on details; she is picky.

He loses his temper because he's so involved in his job; she's bitchy.

When he's depressed (or hungover), everyone tiptoes past

his office; she's moody, so it must be her time of the month.

He follows through; she doesn't know when to quit.

He is confident; she's conceited.

He stands firm; she's impossible to deal with.

He is firm; she's hard.

His judgements are her prejudices.

He's a man of the world; she's been around.

He drinks because of the excessive job pressures; she's a lush.

He isn't afraid to say what he thinks; she's mouthy.

He exercises authority diligently; she's power mad.

He's close-mouthed; she's secretive.

He climbed the ladder of success; she slept her way to the top.

He's a stern taskmaster; she's hard to work for.

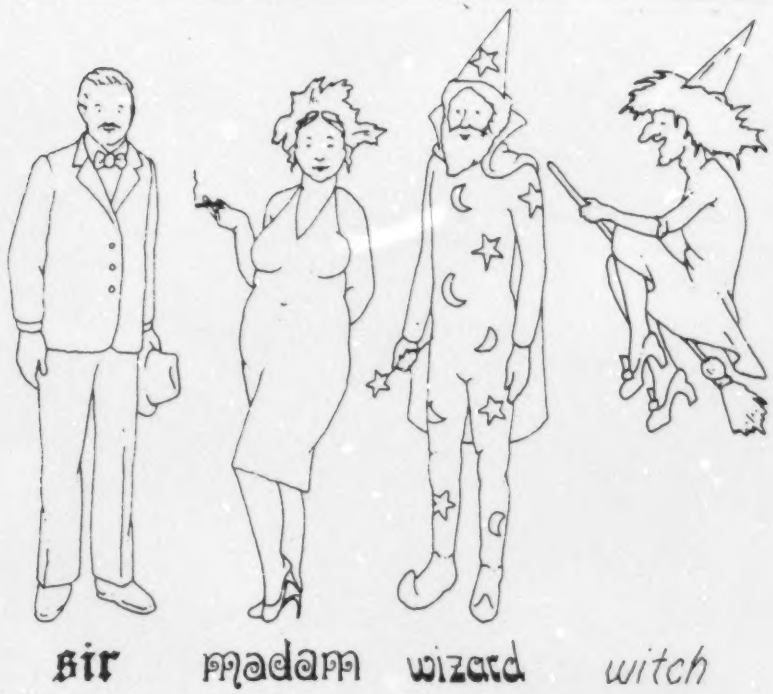
He's witty; she's sarcastic.[10]

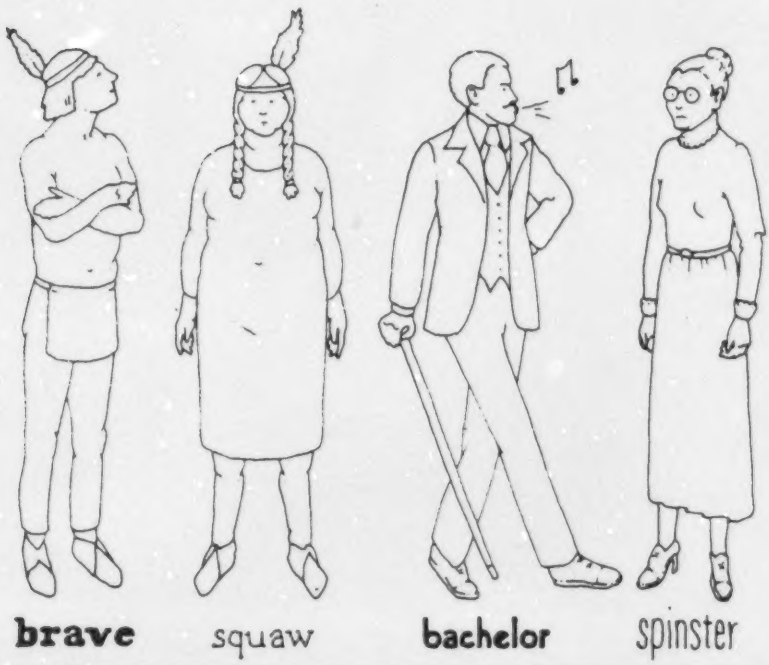
A simple activity which might be used in place of this last one is to read a list of words to students and have them jot down "male" or "female," whichever comes to their minds first. Words selected might include the following: assertive, aggressive, pushy, ambitious, gossipy, affiable, prostitute, whore, tramp. Discuss choices. Then discuss actions of males and females who might be given those descriptors, and note any discrepencies. How is an aggressive man different from an aggressive woman? Is it appropriate for women to be ambitious? How does a male tramp differ from a female tramp? Is it possible for a man to be a prostitute? A whore? What is the difference?

Betty Renshaw, in her handout entitled "Games/Exercises for Revealing/Dealing with Sexism," suggests a similar exercise:

> Have students make two columns on a sheet of paper, each numbered one through eight, labeling one column "female," the other "male." Then ask them to write the first word that comes to mind to describe or name each of the following:
>
> (a) Unmarried 45-year-old women. Unmarried 45-year-old men.
> (b) Females who dominate their family. Males who dominate...
> (c) Males who are outspoken with their opinions. Females who are outspoken...
> (d) Wives who boss their spouses. Husbands who boss...
> (e) A male teenager who is unmarried and sexually active. A female teenager who is unmarried and...
> (f) A female teenager who drinks, tells dirty jokes, or swears. A male teenager who...
> (g) A man who excels in sports. A woman who...
> (h) A woman whose job is cleaning house and cooking. A man whose...
>
> Then, discuss the impact that language has on our thoughts and behaviors. 11

Yet another approach can be used in making students aware of the sexist assumptions often conveyed by connotative meanings of words - the visual approach. Start by projecting the cartoon[12] on the following page or by giving students copies. Ask if the cartoon accurately depicts the meanings associated with the pairs of words and why the pairs of words carry such different connotations. See if students can think of other pairs of words that should be parallel in meaning but instead carry very different connotative meanings. Such words might include lord/lady (whoever heard of a cleaning lord?), governor/governess, master/mistress, courtier/courtesan, knight/dame.





Praise him/blame her words: why is it that *sir* and *madam* carry very dif-

12

An activity that I have used in an interdisciplinary writing course unit on sexism would also be appropriate for a discussion of denotative and connotative language:

> Hand out dittoed sheets divided into four boxes titled Feminine, Masculine, Womanly, and Manly. Give students only a few minutes to jot down ideas that come spontaneously to mind as they look at each word. Encourage them to fill the boxes completely, and have them identify themselves by their sex only. Draw similar boxes on the board and fill them by having students call out their written responses. (If the class is a reticent one, the teacher could make out dittoed lists from their papers and continue the next meeting.) Discuss the different connotations that each word has for different people in the class. Then note any differences between the first two sets of words and the second. Does feminine connote something different from womanly? Masculine from manly? Follow up by having students look up the four words in their dictionaries and also emasculate and effeminate. Discuss these dictionary definitions and ask how much language reflects societal views and how much it influences these views.

An alternate version of this exercise would be to have all the male responses separated from the female responses. Then, differences could be discussed. Or, male responses to feminine and womanly could be used and females could then react to the responses and vice-versa.

Selection of Details

An extension of the consideration of the usage of connotative/denotative language is a consideration of the selection of details. To make students more conscious of the role of selected details in creating an impression (particularly a sexist impression), read the following portion of the newspaper article "Male Mayor Gets Taste of Queries His Female Counterparts Receive" - without reading the title:

Dallas Mayor Jack Evans, a tall, willowy man, was interviewed last week in his 5th-floor office at City Hall. The scene was striking. The natural tones of the office furniture perfectly matched his camel sports coat.

The interview began with a question about the change in city managers--George Schrader has been replaced recently by his assistant, Charles Anderson. The mayor was asked to compare the two men.

As the mayor pondered, he flicked a thread from his light-blue designer shirt. His jewelry was gold and understated.

"Are you interested in their different approaches to city government or the differences in their policies?" he asked boyishly.

What about the differences in the way the two managers dress?

"George Schrader is more formal. He was always in three-piece suits," said the husband of North Dallas homemaker Gene Evans. "Charles Anderson is a lot more casual. His clothes are, too."

The mayor shyly drew the conversation back to City Hall issues. He explained there was a tough zoning case in the council meeting the day before.

But how does he know what to wear to face a challenge like that?

"I love clothes, but I'm a casual clothes man myself," said the leggy mayor, who was sporting a pair of brown slacks. "But for council meeting days, I usually wear a gray, pin-striped suit."

What does he consider his worst fashion mistake?

"It's this cashmere coat that looks like a horse blanket. There just aren't very many places I can wear it. I would never bring it to City Hall."

It's 10 a.m. and the mayor's schedule for the day was jammed. Time was at a premium.

That's why it's so important for him to have the kind of hair style he can do himself. He ran a well-manicured finger through his mane of gray-frosted hair. The pompadour was full and shining. He confided he's been going to the same barber for 20 years.

"Is the frosting natural, or do you touch it up?"

"It's all natural," he said vivaciously. . . .

Now, about his lifestyle. Has it changed since he's been mayor? What does he do for fun?

"Oh, I like to socialize. I love meeting people. I do a lot of socializing on the job. There are lots of luncheons and dinners. Of course, I have to watch what I eat....I like to keep in shape."

He struck a lithesome pose.

> Will he share his secrets of keeping trim?
> "I use the stairs instead of the elevator. I eat small portions."
> The mayor smiled disarmingly and said he had to excuse himself. He was due to make a speech in the council chambers.
> He made a graceful exit.
> But the scent of his after-shave still lingered. It's Lagerfeld from Neiman-Marcus. 13

After reading this parody of an interview, ask students to respond:

1. What feelings did you have while listening?
2. Does this sound like "realistic" reporting?
3. Have you ever noticed reporting like this? Where? Who were the people interviewed?
4. What is the effect of choosing details of appearance and personal life when discussing political or other public figures?

After class discussion, give students the following assignment:

> Find a newspaper or magazine article on a current public figure that emphasizes dress, appearance, & family life. Bring to class to share. If you find more than one, how many are written about men? About women? When does it seem appropriate to focus on appearance and family life? When not?

Students might then write two papers on the same topic in which the selection of details (perhaps together with the use of connotative language) creates two strikingly different impressions. These could be done in a number of ways. The teacher may simply require that students create a positive and a negative impression. Or they might create one which shows respect for a person and another which trivializes that person and her or his accomplishments. Or students may even write one account which is sexist and one which isn't.

CLARITY

Perhaps one of the most serious concerns of the English teacher is the need for clarity in writing. Numerous studies have indicated that the "generic" masculine is not perceived as generic by a majority of people. Citing research might convince students of the lack of clarity created by the use of the "generic" masculine, but perhaps a better tactic is to have students discover their own responses to the use of the generic masculine through class activities:

Ask students to sit quietly with their eyes closed and to let their imaginations create pictures while they listen to the passage being read. Encourage them to notice any images that they "see":

> "...It is now thought that a million years ago and more, earth was populated with more or less manlike creatures, descended not from apes but from some forefather of both apes and men."
> "The personal commitment of a man to his skill, the intellectual commitment and the emotional commitment working together as one, has made the Ascent of Man."
> "Man has learned a lot. He has invented ever so many things. Someday you may even be able to go and visit other planets." 14

Give students an opportunity to respond. How many pictured women involved in the various activities? How many pictured men? What exactly did the ape-like creatures look like to them? What did they picture them doing?

Now ask them to once again close their eyes and let their imaginations and emotions respond freely while the next passage is being read:

WOMAN --- WHICH INCLUDES MAN, OF COURSE

An Experience in Awareness

Adapted from Theodora Wells

There is much concern today about the future of man, which means of course, both men and women---generic Man. For a woman to take exception to this use of the term "man" is often seen as defensive hairsplitting by an "emotional female."

The following role-reversal is an invitation to awareness in which you are asked to feel into, and stay with, your feelings about the use of the generic Woman.

1. Consider reversing the generic term Man. Think of the future of Woman, which, of course, includes both women and men. Feel into that, sensing its meaning to you... as woman... as man.

2. Think of it always being that way, every day of your life. Feel the everpresence of woman and feel the non-presence of man. Absorb what it tells you about the importance and value of being woman--- of being man.

3. Remember that your early ancestral relatives were Cro-Magnon Woman, Java Woman, Neanderthal Woman, Peking Woman--- which includes man of course. Recall that Early Woman invented fire and discovered the use of stone tools near the beginning of the Ice Age. Remember that what separates Woman from other species is that she can think.

4. Recall that everything you have ever read all your life uses only female pronouns--- she, her---meaning both girls and boys, both women and men. Recall that most of the voices on radio and most of the faces on TV are women's---when important events are covered---on commercials ---and on late night talk shows. Recall that you have no male senators representing you in Washington.

5. Feel into the fact that women are the leaders, the power-centers, the primemovers. Man, whose natural role is husband and father, fulfills humself through nurturing children and making the home a refuge for woman. This is only natural to balance the biological role of woman who devotes her entire body to the race during pregnancy. Pregnancy ---the most revered power known to Woman---(and man, of course).

6. Then feel further into the obvious biological explanation for woman as the ideal By design, the female reproductive center is compact and internal, protected by her body. The male is so exposed that he must be protected from outside attack to assure the perpetuation of the race. Thus by nature, males are more passive than females.

7. If the male denies these feelings, he is unconsciously rejecting his masculinity. Therapy is thus indicated to help him adjust to his own nature. Of course, therapy is administered by a woman, who has the education and wisdom to facilitate openness leading to the male's self growth and actualization.

8. To help him feel into his defensive emotionality, he is invited to get in touch with the "child" in him. He remembers his sister could run, climb, and ride horseback unencumbered. Obviously, since she is free to move, she is encouraged to develop her body and mind in preparation for her active responsibilities of adult womanhood. Male vulnerability needs female protection, so he is taught the less active, caring virtues of homemaking.

9. He is encouraged to keep his body lean and dream of getting married, "I now pronounce you Woman and Husband." He waits for the time of fulfillment: when "his woman" gives him a girl-child to carry on her family name. He knows that if it is a boy-child he has failed somehow ---but they can try again.

10. In getting to your feelings on being a woman---on being a man--- stay with the sensing you are now experiencing. As the words begin to surface, say what you feel inside you.

For younger students, another approach might work better. (Or this approach could be used in addition to the previous one for college level students as well; it was used originally as an exercise in a teacher awareness training workshop.)

Tell students that you are going to read a passage from a news article in which the word Martian will sometimes mean a Martian and sometimes mean an American citizen. Ask students to listen carefully and to be aware of any images formed in their minds. After reading the passage, ask if it caused any confusion. Did they imagine American citizens when the context indicated that was what was meant? Or did they still imagine Martians at first? Do they see any similarity between the use of Martian to mean both Martians and human beings and the use of man to mean both males and females? Why or why not?

Any current news article or newscast could be used for this exercise and would probably be more effective than an outdated article. However, teachers interested in seeing the article originally used with this exercise and perhaps in modeling one after it should consult Alice Mooney Mulvihill, et. al., Teacher Skill Guide for Combating Sexism. Module 2. Sex Bias in Language and Instructional Materials (ERIC: ED 196 824, 1979).

Another problem created by the use of the "generic" masculine is ambiguity. It is often difficult to determine whether the writer intended the masculine to be gender-specific or generic, and often a passage will start off seeming to be generic and then shift its meaning midway. Students can be made

aware of this ambiguity in their own writing by comments made on the papers such as, "Do you mean males only? Or do you mean to include females also? I cannot tell from the context." Such comments point out the lack of clarity and the need for change to more specific language rather than arbitrarily legislate change and therefore may meet with less resistance. But perhaps students need to be convinced first that the usage really is ambiguous. The following class activity might help:

> Prepare an overhead transparency so that portions of the various statements can be temporarily covered up. Start with several usages of the masculine and ask students whether the usage is generic or gender-specific:
>
> Man is a dreamer.
>
> Man domesticated animals.
>
> Neanderthal man was a hunter.
>
> When man invented the wheel, his world was revolutionized.
>
> Men by the thousands rebelled against tyranny.
>
> All men are created equal.
>
> Note any disputed responses as an instance of the lack of clarity. The dispute over the last statement in the legal system, especially, might be noted. (For this you may wish to consult Haig Bosmajian's article "Sexism in the Language of Legislatures and Courts," in Sexism and Language, NCTE, pp. 77-104.) Next reveal the following pair of statements on the overhead projector. How does the meaning of "the average working man" shift?
>
> The rich cannot possibly appreciate the impact of inflation on the average working man.
>
> The average working man earns about twice as much as the average working woman.
>
> Finally, reveal only the first part of each of the following statements (to the /) and have students decide whether or not they think that the usage is generic. Then reveal the second half and discuss any changed opinions. What is the effect of the shift?

Man can do several things which the animal cannot do/ His vital interests are not only life, food, access to females, but also values, symbols, institutions.
(Note that this could also be separated after food.)

Or (more simply)

To survive man needs food, water, shelter,/ and female companionship.

As for man, he is no different from the rest. His back aches, he ruptures easily/ his women have difficulties in childbirth. 15

And what is one to think of our fellow citizens and their passivity? They will take anything!/ It's enough to make you wonder whether someone has relieved them of their manly attributes.
Attributes of which she, on the other hand, clearly had plenty, despite her sex. (Robert Merle, Malevil, p. 340) 16

To complete this exercise, show students a copy of the Eakins and Eakins cartoon on "men of good will":

142 WHEN WORDS SPEAK LOUDER THAN PEOPLE

When reading about "men of good will," how many readers will picture a group of amicable females?

AUDIENCE RESPONSE

A final area where sexist language discussions and exercises fit naturally into the composition program (and one related to the last unit on clarity) is audience response. Not only do people often misperceive intended meaning because of the use of sexist language, but many people are also becoming offended by its usage. In writing, students need to think of their intended audiences and avoid alienating them. Becoming aware of responses to sexist language even just within a single classroom might sensitize them to its usage. The following exercise has as its goal this awareness. It is, perhaps, more suitable to high school seniors and college students than to younger students:

> Provide students with the following list of statements and have them label each using these descriptors:
>
> 1) perfectly acceptable - I wouldn't hesitate to write or say this
> 2) somewhat questionable - I might rephrase to avoid
> 3) objectionable in some way - I would avoid saying or writing this
>
> Some statements are intended primarily to raise consciousness or to indicate possible alternatives while others are intended to stimulate serious class discussion. Each alternative to a statement should be labelled.
>
> "Man, being a mammal, breast-feeds his young."[17]
>
> "Menstral pain accounts for an enormous loss of man-power hours." 18
>
> Ralph wanted a career girl for a wife. (career woman)
>
> Sally wanted a career boy for a husband. (career man)
>
> The gynecologist Dr. Susan Strand was presented a medical award for service to her fellowman.
>
> Mary is John's widow.

John is Mary's widower.[19]

If I had more money, I would hire a cleaning lady.

If I had more money, I would hire a cleaning lord.

Chapter three describes the "development of the uterus in rats, guinea pigs and men." 20

We hired a new girl for the office; she has 21 years of clerical experience.

According to The National Enquirer, Liz and Burton have become reconciled.

Paul Roberts was elected chairman of the committee.
(chair . . . chairperson . . . chairwoman)

Susan Powers was elected chairman of the committee.
(chair . . . chairperson . . . chairwoman)

Gloria Steinem is a famous women's libber.

Stokley Carmichael is a famous civil rights libber.

The average student is worried about his grades.
(her grades . . . their grades . . . his or her grades. . . his/her grades . . . her or his grades)

Emily Dickinson is a famous American poetess.

Janet Robins is a lady lawyer.

Marathon swimmer Diana Nyad became the first man to swim the 60 miles from the Bahamas to Florida. 21

Man has two sexes. Some men are female. 22

After students have had sufficient time to label the statements, ask for their responses:

1) What did they base a decision of "objectionable" on? Was the passage offensive because it trivialized or excluded women? Did it sound odd or ridiculous?
2) Did any paired statements make them want to reconsider first responses? Why or why not? If yes, which ones?
3) What assumptions lie behind some of the statements?
4) Can they think of other sexist usages of language that they have found particularly offensive?

SEXIST LANGUAGE IN LITERATURE

Carol Carpenter in her article "Exercises to Combat Sexist Reading and Writing"[23] suggests an exercise to make students more aware of sexist language in literature. Students should each choose a male and a female character and sample passages from a work of fiction. (Carpenter recommends using works by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Earnest Hemingway, and Joyce Carol Oates.) Students should then make lists of nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs used repeatedly to describe each character or in the character's speech. Using the word lists, students can then determine the author's attitude towards each character and by comparing their findings perhaps towards men and women in general. Students might ask: 1) How many active verbs have been used for each character? 2) What sounds of words are used and what are the effects of these? Are they harsh? Soft? Gutteral? 3) Does word choice work toward defining and limiting characters? Towards revealing theme? Towards creating role models? Carpenter then provides sample questions for a class discussion on the effects of sexism on the characters:

> Are Hemingway's characters made vulnerable because of their adherence to the male-female code of behavior?
>
> Does Henry question the dicta of masculinity or try to escape the conventional acting out of the male ego?
>
> Does the culture and environment of the First World War affect male or female characters differently; are particular "war" sex roles and expectations created?

The assignment might end with a character sketch or character analysis, or similar word lists might be used as brainstorming devices for personal experience papers on sexist attitudes.

NON-SEXIST USAGE EXERCISE

Once students have been sensitized to the desirability of non-sexist language, they need exercises in creating non-sexist alternatives to sexist language. Students could be provided with copies of a publisher's guide to non-sexist usage such as the McGraw-Hill guidelines or the Scott, Foreman and Company guidelines (see appendix) or even Miller and Swift's Handbook of Nonsexist Writing. Then they might be asked to revise a list of sexist statements and explain why they are sexist. Or they might work in small groups with such a list before seeing any such guidelines and try to come up with their own solutions. They would then be confronted with difficulties in making changes and could discuss them in the larger group. Finally a guidelines handout or the Miller/Swift Handbook could be consulted for those usages which the group found difficult to alter. A third usage of such a list could be as an evaluation of the students' understanding of sexist language and non-sexist alternatives or of one's own teaching about sexist and non-sexist language. Examples come primarily from the guidelines:

1. Change the following sentence in two ways to avoid the use of the masculine pronoun:

   The average American drinks his coffee black.

2. Explain what is sexist about the following:

   the men and the ladies

   career girl

   housewife

women's libber

man and wife

coed

poetess

In New England, the typical farm was so small that the owner and his sons could take care of it by themselves.

A slave could not claim his wife or children as his own because the laws did not recognize slave marriage.

The ancient Egyptians allowed women considerable control over property.

The candidates were Bryan K. Wilson, president of American Electronics, Inc., and Florence Greenwood, a pert, blonde grandmother of five.

3. Give possible non-sexist alternatives for the following:

fireman	repairman
policeman	manhole
salesman	brotherhood
congressman	fellowship
insurance man	man-made
chairman	early man
foreman	Neanderthal man
man power	common man
mailman	History of the Black Man in America
mankind	

PART II: EXERCISES FOR TEACHER PREPARATION CLASSES

TODAY, CLASS, WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING IMPORTANT: HUMAN RIGHTS.

I BELIEVE THAT BOYS AND GIRLS ARE ABSOLUTELY EQUAL. I MEAN IT.

THE TRUTH IS...

-CYNTHIA, STOP SCRATCHING: IT'S NOT LADYLIKE.

THE TRUTH IS, ANYONE CAN DO ANYTHING NOWADAYS - REGARDLESS OF THEIR SEX.

-HONESTLY, BILL! I'VE TOLD YOU A THOUSAND TIMES: BOYS DON'T FIDDLE WITH THEIR HAIR!

-YOU WILL FIND THAT THERE IS NO SEX BIAS IN MY CLASS. EVER.

AH! THERE'S THE BELL. ALRIGHT: CLASS DISMISSED!

-GOOD HEAVENS, ANNIE! DON'T LIFT THAT STOOL - LET GEORGE DO IT!!

...OH, IT FEELS SO GOOD TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO LIBERATE YOUNG PEOPLE!

Cartoon by Elsa Bailey

CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING ACTIVITIES

As the preceding cartoon by Elsa Bailey[24] implies, a belief in the equality of males and females is not enough. We as teachers must become aware of our own sexist attitudes and of the power of language to create stereotypes and limit roles. Many of the exercises and activities used for consciousness raising about sexist language in the previous unit would be useful also in a teacher preparation class. "Women--Which Includes Man, Of Course" (pp. 13-14) might be a good starting point, or students might begin by responding to the list of statements on pages 18-19. Alice Mooney Mulvihill begins a teacher's workshop on sexist language with the Martian newscast exercise (p. 15).

Other materials can be designed or adapted for use in a teacher preparation class. One possibility is a parody of faculty meeting minutes. (This parody is based primarily upon actual statements heard in a variety of departmental and faculty meetings although part is based on examples from non-sexist guidelines.)

Faculty Meeting Minutes

> The faculty meeting opened with the introduction of four full professors who were being considered for the position of visiting lecturer for the course "Man and His History." Professor Smith, Chairman of the Search Committee, introduced the candidates: "Dr. Robert Manly is famous for his studies of how immigrants moved from the Old World to the New World, bringing their wives and children with them. Dr. Wallace George has spent twenty years studying aboriginal man in Australia. Finally, Mrs. Edwin Summit has studied man's religions prior to recorded history through investigation of man-made artifacts."
>
> Following the three excellent speeches, Dr. Blane Wilson, Chairman of the Business Department, introduced a new faculty member: "Mr. Eastwood has done his research on the plight of the working girl. We're pleased to welcome him into our department." Another new faculty member was introduced by

> Susan Montgomery, Chairman of the Chemistry Department: "I'd like to introduce Professor Bert Reynald from California Tech," she began. "And one thing I will say for him is that he certainly has improved the looks of the department."
>
> A quick vote was taken for the secretary of the faculty meetings for the current academic year. "She should be someone," President Thurmond noted as he asked for nominations, "who is able to transcribe notes accurately and rapidly and who attends faculty meetings regularly." He closed the meeting with a reminder of the reception for the three candidates where the lady and the two men would be available for questioning. "I assure you," he said, "that we intend to hire the most suitable candidate, regardless of his sex."

Pass out copies of the minutes and have students circle any portions which they find sexist. Discuss circled passages and their reasons for circling. If noone notes the sexism of a particular passage, the instructor could point out that such a usage has often been considered sexist and have students try to determine why. Then students might explain why they did not consider the passage as sexist. Would the chemistry department introduction have been considered sexist had the roles been reversed? Why or why not?

Another consciousness raising activity that might be used is to have students consider the implications of the observations made by Professor Tollefson of the University of Washington in his classroom handout, "On the use of 'he or she' (and other details)":

1. In an address by a prominent linguist, "he" was used throughout the lecture in reference to "a linguist," "a student," "a speaker," etc. In only one instance did he use "he or she": when he said "if someone is an amoeboid or mental midget, then he or she..."
2. In California, an information pamphlet for potential jurors calls lawyers and judges "he," while jury members are "he or she," but the jury foreman is "he."
3. Research shows that "he or she" is used by newspapers to refer to campaign workers, but "he" is used to refer to possible political candidates.

4. Military officers are typically "he," while enlisted personnel are "he or she."
5. In the film "The Main Event" starring Barbra Streisand and Ryan O'Neal, O'Neal as a boxer rants to his manager, Streisand: "What am I, a piece of Meat? Whaddaya think I am, a girl? I'm a person. I'm a man." Note the ascending order of status: Girl is above piece of meat, below person, two levels below man.
6. The Associate of Arts degree now given by two-year colleges in the U.S. was originally the degree given at women's colleges because it was thought unseemly to give a bachelor's degree to a young lady.
7. When asked his opinion about abortion, S.I. Hayakawa replied: "I believe it's strictly a matter between a patient and his doctor." It may be semantically correct but biologically shaky.
8. Research on the use of "person" rather than "man" by university newspapers reveals that "man" is systematically used for individuals in power (e.g. department chairman) while "person" is used for those people with relatively little power in the university structure (e.g. a student chairperson of a student committee). That is, "man" is an indicator of power, "person" an indicator of powerlessness.

Ambiguity

Potential teachers should become aware of the problem of ambiguity caused by the use of the "generic" masculine, both through looking at examples and through becoming acquainted with some of the research. The former task could be accomplished by discussing examples used in the exercise on pages 16 & 17, with two additions. The first is Paul Meehl's description of a hypothetical researcher as quoted by Wendy Martyna. (Female students might be asked if they can identify with the imagery of Meehl's description):

> "He" produces a long list of publications but little contribution to the enduring body of knowledge, and "his true position is that of the potent-but-sterile rake, who leaves in his merry wake a long train of ravished maidens, but no viable scientific offspring."25

The second is an excerpt from William K. Zinsser's textbook On Writing Well:

> Who is this elusive creature the reader? He is a person with an attention span of about 20 seconds. He is assailed on every side by forces competing for his time: by newspapers and magazines, by television and radio and stereo, by his wife and children and pets.[26]

Zinsser's statement might lead into a discussion of the subtle sexism that they can begin to be alert to in texts.

The task of acquainting students with research on the perception of the generic masculine could be accomplished either by providing them with a list of resources or with a summary of the research. Miller and Swift provide such a summary in their chapter "Who Is Man" in Words and Women (New York: Doubleday, 1976). An oft-cited article is Joseph W. Schneider and Sally L. Hatcher's "Sex Role Imagery and Use of the Generic 'Man' in Introductory Texts: A Case in the Sociology of Sociology," The American Sociologist 8(Feb. 1973), 12-18.[27]

A final consciousness raising activity might be to have students discover the origins of the generic masculine. This exercise can be approached in two ways. The first involves primary research:

O.E.D. Exercise

> Consult the O.E.D.(Oxford English Dictionary) and answer the following questions:
>
> > What does the OED say about the use of they to refer to singular, indefinite pronouns? What historical examples show they being used in a way discouraged today by many people or even considered "illiterate"? Cite two examples.
> >
> > What is the origin of the word man? What is the predominant current usage? What usage has been labeled obsolete?
> >
> > What is the origin of the word wife? Of the word werewolf?

Although primary research is perhaps the most powerful, there are a number of provocative secondary resources on the origins of the generic masculine. What they add are accounts of justifications of the usage of the masculine as generic, specifically on chauvinistic grounds. For that reason, professors may wish to use the following exercise in addition to the O.E.D. exercise:

Origins and Justifications for the Generic Masculine

How was the word man first used in English? When did its meaning begin to shift? Why? What justifications were made in early grammars (and even in the English Parliament) to prescribe (or legislate) the usage of the masculine gender to refer to both males and females? What English pronouns have shifted in meaning or usage? In answering these questions, the following resources may be helpful:

Bodine, Ann. "Androcentrism in Prescriptive Grammar: Singular 'They,' Sex-Indefinite 'He,' and 'He or She.' Language in Society 4(1975), 131.

Miller and Swift. The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing (New York: Lippincott and Crowell, 1980), pp. 9-13.

Miller and Swift. Words and Women (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 27-28.

Spender, Dale. Man-Made Language (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 147-51.

Stanley, Julia P. "Sexist Grammar." College English 39 (March 1978), pp. 800-811.

Stanley, Julia P. The Sexist Tradition: Words and Meaning (ERIC: ED 162 303, 1977).

Timm, Lenora A. "Not Mere Tongue-in-Cheek: The Case for a Common Gender Pronoun in English." International Journal of Women's Studies 1(1978), pp. 559-61.

An exercise which forms a bridge between consciousness raising and practical application is one based on an excerpt from Bloomfield's book Language:

Jack and Jill: Action and Speech

> Consider the following passage from Leonard Bloomfield's book Language. This passage has been offered by Bloomfield as an observation of "an act of speech-utterance":
>
> "Suppose that Jack and Jill are walking down a lane. Jill is hungry. She sees an apple in a tree. She makes a noise with her larynx, tongue, and lips. Jack vaults the fence, climbs the tree, takes the apple, brings it to Jill, and places it in her hand. Jill eats the apple....
> Not every Jack and Jill would behave like these. If Jill were bashful or if she had had bad experiences of Jack, she might be hungry and see the apple and still say nithing; if Jack were ill disposed toward her, he might not fetch her the apple, even though she asked for it. The occurrence of a speech (and, as we shall see, the wording of it) and the whole course of practical events before and after it, depend upon the entire life-history of the speaker and of the hearer....
> If Jill had been alone, she might have been just as hungry and thirsty and might have seen the same apple. If she had sufficient strength and skill to get over the fence and climb the tree, she could get hold of the apple and eat it; if not, she would have to stay hungry." 28
>
> What are your personal responses to this passage? What are some assumptions made by Bloomfield? When might Jill have tried to climb the tree according to this passage? In what other ways might Jill and Jack have behaved? Do you think that passages like these (or with these assumptions) would have any long-range effects on children's self-concepts and beliefs? How might a teacher make students aware of the stereotyping and its limiting effects on children's behavior and self-concepts? Of its lack of convergence with reality? Bloomfield continues to make his assumptions about male/female relations and roles as clear as those on the speech act:
>
> "At once, Jack began to make the reactions for her; he performed actions that were beyond Jill's strength, and in the end Jill got the apple" (p. 139) and "Whether Jill will speak depends largely on her liking for apples and on her past experience of Jack" (p. 147).
>
> What possible reasons for Jill's speaking or not speaking are omitted by Bloomfield? Surprisingly, this entire passage

follows Bloomfield's assertion that the linguist "observes all speech forms impartially" (p. 138). What effect might such a statement have on readers of his hypothetical example of the entire speech act?

As you read this semester, especially in education materials, keep copies of passages with sexist assumptions. If materials are intended for children or young people, jot down ideas for combating the sexism while using the sexist materials since many school systems haven't had the money to get rid of blatantly sexist materials (and nonsexist alternates are still in short supply), and you may need to work with them. We'll share our findings and ideas at the end of the term.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION EXERCISES

As the last exercise suggested, teacher education students need more than an awareness of sexist language and the problems that it creates; they also need information and tactics for combating the effects of sexist materials on their students. The ERIC document Teacher Skills Guide for Combating Sexism[29] offers suggestions for countering the effects of sexist materials used in the classroom. One is having students make "self-statements." After reading a story in which a girl has decided to ask a boy for help when she has broken something, students are encouraged to decide what she could have thought instead, eg., "'I might be able to fix this.'" Another suggestion was having students role-play or rewrite an alternate scene or ending to a sex-biased story. Also the suggestion was made to have children say "oops" or "beep" whenever sexist language was heard in the classroom and to quickly supply a nonsexist alternative. Carol Carpenter in her article "Exercises to Combat Sexist Reading and Writing" suggests an activity that could be used even with elementary students - rewriting (or perhaps retelling) a sexist

fairy tale or nursery rime.[30] To practice such tactics, students could be divided into small groups and provided with different sexist stories or passages to work with. Each group should determine first what is sexist about its story, what the underlying assumptions and stereotypes are. Then the group should devise class strategies for countering the effects of the sexism. Finally groups could role play their strategies for the larger group.[31]

Another important step in combating sexist instructional materials is developing and/or using guidelines for non-sexist materials and language. Numerous activities can address this goal. One possibility is to have students develop their own list of guidelines for readers and handbooks, either in small groups or independently. Brainstorming might be followed by a gleaning of such guidelines in ERIC. Or the professor might simply pass out some established guidelines and have students compare these with their own brainstorming efforts. Holt, Rinehart and Winston's guidelines have been provided in the appendix as well as a handout which is a compilation of guidelines from a number of sources prepared by Mulvihill, et. al.

Simulation exercises might also be used to have students work with guidelines, references, and materials in a way that they could expect to in their professional careers. The following involve the selection of library books or textbooks:

Library Book Selection

> Your school has just received a grant to increase your library holdings, with the stipulation that books purchased be non-sexist. The chair of your department has asked each teacher to compile a list of ten fiction books for adolescents and to provide both a brief summary of the books and a justification for their being considered non-sexist. You are to look for books for grade levels _____. Selected books and their justifications will be discussed at a departmental meeting. Please bring a sufficient number of copies of your list for all teachers in the department.

As a preface to this activity, students might discuss where they would be likely to find annotated bibliographies of non-sexist fiction or summaries of books for adolescents. If noone mentions ERIC, students should be encouraged to look there for pertinent references and articles. Several guidelines which are either available without charge or which may be reproduced without permission (provided proper credit is given) have been included in the appendix to this paper. Students should be provided with at least one of these if they have not already developed their own guidelines. If time permits, the instructor could act as chair and hold a simulated departmental meeting. If not, students could simply receive copies of each others' annotated lists. The following simulation involves an even more important selection - the reading text:

Textbook Selection: Reader

> Your elementary or junior high school is considering the adoption of a new reader, and you have been appointed to the selection committee. Your task is to consider the sex role stereotyping (or its absence) in the assigned textbook(s). Using the following "Checklist for Evaluating Sexism in Readers," consider the text(s) and make your recommendations.

CHECK LIST FOR EVALUATING SEXISM IN READERS

Go through each book you are planning to use for the points listed below:

	MALE	FEMALE
1. Number of stories where main character is:		
2. Number of illustrations of:		
3. Number of times children are shown:		
a. in active play		
b. using initiative		
c. independent		
d. solving problems		
e. earning money		
f. receiving recognition		
g. inventive		
h. involved in sports		
i. being passive		
j. fearful		
k. helpless		
l. receiving help		
m. shown in quiet play		
4. Number of times adults are shown		
a. in different occupations		
b. playing with children		
c. taking children on outings		
d. teaching skills		
e. giving tenderness		
f. scolding children		
g. biographically		

5. Ask these questions:

1. Are boys allowed to show emotions?
2. Are girls rewarded for intelligence rather than for beauty?
3. Are there any derogatory comments directed at girls in general?
4. Is mother shown working outside the home? What kind of job?
5. Are there any stories about one-parent families? Families without children? Are babysitters shown?
6. Are minority and ethnic groups treated naturally instead of stereotypically?

32

This simulation can be organized in a number of ways. One is to have each student choose a preferred grade level. Another is to have each student or small group of students choose a different series and then share their findings with the larger group. A third variation is to choose a particularly sexist

textbook series and then have students propose alternatives and justify their choices by proving that there is a problem with the selected text and that their alternatives are less sexist. This last variation might most closely resemble actual situations that they will encounter as non-sexist language advocates in school systems indifferent to or unaware of the problem of sexism in textbooks. The last simulation exercise directly addresses this possible situation:

Handbook Selection

> Your high school or college department is considering the adoption of a new handbook, and you are particularly concerned about the issue of sexist language in texts. You have therefore organized an informal committee to analyze the possible choices for sexist language. Each person will analyze a different text and report back to the committee as a whole. You have agreed to analyze _____, considering the following aspects:
>
> 1. A comparison of the number of males and females used in examples.
> 2. The predominant roles that men and women assume.
> 3. The use and explanation of the generic masculine.
> 4. Usage rules for pronoun agreement.
> 5. Derogatory remarks made about women or female nature in examples.
> 6. Pronouns used in addressing teachers and students.
> 7. Use of titles referring to women and men.
>
> One member of the committee has agreed to summarize any studies available on sexism in handbooks. 33

CONCLUSION

Sexist language is not a problem that is likely to be eliminated in the near future, if ever. But we as educators can have a healthy impact on our own classes by making our students aware of the implications of sexist language--its distortions and ambiguity as well as its demeaning and alienating effect on women. An experiential approach, coupled with a sense of humor and good will, rather than a judgmental or dictatorial one, will hopefully enable students to change their attitudes as well as their language usage and will give them greater insight into their own unconscious assumptions as well as those communicated by our male-oriented language. Our own increasing consciousness of sexist language and its effects can also direct us in our selection of instructional materials and our use of materials that are sexist so that our students can become freer of artificially imposed limitations on their goals, concepts, and aspirations.

Endnotes

[1]Quoted by H. Lee Gershuny in "Sexism in the Language of Literature," Sexism and Language (Urbana, Ill.: N.C.T.E., 1977), p. 107.

[2]Presented at the N.C.T.E. National Convention in Boston, November, 1981. Renshaw notes that the idea comes from Media and Methods, October 1975 -"with modifications")

[3]Casey Miller and Kate Swift, The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing (New York: Lippincott & Crowell, 1980), p. 12.

[4]Ibid., p. 48.

[5]Julia P. Stanley, "Gender-Marking in American English: Usage and Reference," Sexism and Language, p. 70.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Miller and Swift, Handbook, p. 51.

[9]"Exercises for Men," Radical Therapist 1 (1971). Quoted by Barbara Westbrook Eakins and R. Gene Eakins in Sex Differences in Human Communication (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978), p. 162.

[10]This handout was given to me by Dr. Sandra Silberstein (University of Washington English Department). She didn't know its origins.

[11]Renshaw notes that this exercise also comes "with modifications" from Media and Methods, October 1975.

[12]Eakins and Eakins, p. 132.

[13]Maryln Schwartz, Dallas Morning News. (This is from a newspaper clipping I've had on file for years; I don't know the date or page number.)

[14]Miller and Swift, Handbook, p. 15

[15]Several of these are from Miller and Swift, Handbook, pp. 11-14.

[16]Stanley, p. 70.

[17]Wendy Martyna, "Beyond the 'He/Man' Approach: The Case for Nonsexist Language," Signs 5(1980), p. 489.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Sol Saporta, Language in a Sexist Society (ERIC: ED 098 832, 1974), p. 3.

[20]Miller and Swift, Handbook, p. 9.

[21]Ibid., p. 11

[22]Janice Moulton, "The Myth of the Neutral 'Man,'" Sexist Language: A Modern Philosophical Analysis, Ed. Mary Vetterling-Braggin (Littlefield, Adam, and Co., 1981), p. 111.

[23]Carol Carpenter, "Exercises to Combat Sexist Reading and Writing," College English 43(March 1981), pp. 293-300.

[24]Cartoon printed in Journal of Teacher Education 26(Winter 1975), p. 290.

[25]Martyna, p. 488.

[26]William K. Zinsser, On Writing Well: An Informal Guide to Writing Nonfiction (Harper and Row, 1980), p. 9.

[27]See also Janice Moulton, George Robinson, and Cherin Elias, "Psychology in Action: Sex Bias in Language Use: Neutral Pronouns that Aren't," American Psychologist 33(1978), p. 1033 and Mary Crawford, Sex Differences in Recall as a Function of "Generic" vs. Female-Inclusive Contexts (ERIC: ED 208 378).

[28]Reprinted in Readings in the Theory of Grammar, Ed. by Diane D. Bornstein (Cambridge, Mass: Winthrop Pub., Inc., 1976), pp. 138-39.

[29]Alice Mooney Mulvihill, et.al. Module 2: Sex Bias in Language and Instructional Materials (ERIC: ED 196 824, 1979).

[30]Carpenter, pp. 297-98.

[31]Mulvihill, op. cit.

[32]Cynthia Eaton and Carol Jacobs, "Changing the Textbooks," American Education (June 1973), p. 27.

[33]The following two articles provide a starting point for the last task, especially for handbooks at the college level: Susan J. Wolfe, Set Them an Example: Sexism in the College Handbooks (ERIC: Ed 172 256, 1979) and Diane Z. Worby, "In Search of a Common Language: Women and Education Texts," College English 41(September 1979), pp. 101-106.